

Response to discussion paper on Improving Wildlife Management and Habitat Conservation in BC

As encouraging as it is that this government wishes to discuss with the public wildlife management and habitat conservation it must be up front that it is not wildlife that requires management but we humans. We cannot on one hand flaunt the great tourism success our British Columbia flora and fauna brings to the economy and at the same time continue to overharvest its trees and take down mountains through resource extraction.

Wildlife have managed themselves very successfully prior to our arrival and it has been since then that a continual spiral downward in wildlife numbers and fragmentation of habitat has occurred. We have elevated ourselves to the top of the pyramid for all living creatures on earth and in British Columbia with the attitude that everything else must fit into our way of life rather than remaining within the natural living process and fitting in. The new wildlife management thinking, and habitat conservation planning must be about us getting along with wildlife, how we manage our presence and re-connect the fragmented habitat needed to maintain wildlife populations.

The discussion paper offered to the public for input gave us eight challenges to refer to. While this is a good start there are many more challenges and these eight can be used as a starting point.

Challenge One: Indigenous people in wildlife management & habitat conservation.

The courts have sent a message that indigenous people have access to wildlife more so than non-indigenous and have a say regarding land being managed within their traditional territory. Thus, wildlife management has not been delegated to them and nor should it be. The management authority must remain at the Provincial level and be managed accordingly. Many wildlife species migrate and roam great distances and thus to have many jurisdictions managing them simply would not work. That does not mean indigenous people do not have a say as the public at large do but management of wildlife within BC must remain under one jurisdiction and that being the BC Government.

When it comes to habitat conservation indigenous people need to present a management plan during treaty talks to indicate how habitat will be protected and managed for the flora and fauna they are requesting management rights over. As well monies forming part of the treaty should see a portion being dedicated directly to habitat management. If First Nations people wish to be seen as a government then they must put plans in place that show how they intend to manage the landscape within the area they wish entitlement.

Challenge Two: Increase involvement in wildlife management & habitat conservation.

The previous regional wildlife and fisheries public boards have not worked well and in some areas not at all. Some groups square off over retaining or increasing their access to wildlife and not for the good management of such. In other cases, government staff come to the table with restrictions as well as not wanting to discuss some issues resulting in distrust and walking away by public representatives present.

An ombudsman type oversight group made up of professional, scientific and public at large needs to come into play. This group would look at and review management plans that deal with wildlife and report to the public as well as government. It would be their role to in some cases challenge plans and in other cases give praise. The same would hold true for habitat conservation planning practices.

Challenge Three – Some wildlife populations are declining across the province.

This is an understatement! The government has clear information and signs that a major decline in all wildlife populations have been declining and still are. It is human effects that have had this impact as earlier pointed out. Wildlife populations were able to manage themselves well and at high sustainable numbers prior to our arrival. Indigenous people first arrived and their management used wildfire to alter landscapes to create habitat conducive to wildlife use, so they could hunt them for sustenance. Next non-indigenous people arrived and made use of natural resources with no management of wildlife directly. It has continued to this day that humans manage wildlife and habitat for their own means first and wildlife gets what is left over.

To effectively return wildlife populations to healthy numbers we need to address cumulative effects we as humans are having on wildlife habitat. The overcutting of the forest needs to be brought back to a harvest that does not do this, a cutting method that use selective harvesting and not just clear cutting. The present way we conduct referral (Front Counter BC) is very poor and mainly focused on land management for humans and little consideration for wildlife. It is broken and needs a major overhaul.

We need to stop managing wildlife species by species and move forward to manage by landscape types and populations. The flora and fauna evolved as a unit working together with humans being a part of that process. This needs to be the focus of the new management plan

Regarding hunting with in the province there is nothing wrong with the traditional harvest of wildlife at sustainable levels that meet a healthy wildlife population for sustenance as has been done by humans for many millennia. The guide outfitter and for that matter the angling guiding business are not traditional harvest methods and need now to be looked at if they should remain, as they do not meet the traditional human activity of sustenance removal of wildlife

The same can be said for trapping as we no longer need hides and skins for clothing and other uses as technology now supplies materials to replace such.

Challenge four – Habitat loss, alteration and fragmentation.

Cumulative effects and natural resource extraction have already been mentioned and continue to be the most detrimental impact. Tourist numbers continue to grow along with all the gadget and technical means to enter every valley and mountain top at anytime of year. The impact on both wildlife and their habitat is at an all time threat with no seasonal rest or recovery time left. This needs to be managed better both from management prospective and regulatory means.

Jurisdictions in other areas of Canada and throughout the world have used some very successful techniques. These include on the landscape enacting motorized and mechanical assisted closures at various elevation and critical landscape units and seasonal disturbance closures for all human activities during critical wildlife needs. These management tools give rest and recovery opportunities when needed yet offer human interaction through less obtrusive ways.

The Province has Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) some of which have reached special international significance and been named RAMSAR sites. The province has for the most part agreed there needs to be special areas such as WMA and once determined and set aside done little with them after that. This needs to change dramatically! WMA need to be looked at as special areas of high ecological value used as a reference area for what similar habitats should look like and be managed. WMA are areas where research can be carried out, human interference is minimal and biodiversity in a natural state allowed to be carried out.

Challenge Five – Climate Change.

Climate change has been happening for quite some time with wildlife adapting to it. It is us humans who have been in denial and putting the acceptance off until recently where we are now thrust into the changes. Climate change for this discussion is more about how humans must adapt then wildlife. Habitat is changing and will continue to do so and move to where existence can continue and new ones take over where ones we have become accustomed to exist now. We must submit and let this change happen as the forces of nature take place.

For human existence it means using our technology and scientific knowledge to choose adapting techniques that work best for us and how we fit into the changing ecosystem. By looking at how wildlife and habitats are adapting this will guide our changes. We need to be transparent in accepting that humans may not be able to exist within certain habitats or the associated cost to do so is not attainable and would be better spent adapting to better suited

areas. This would require “moving in” with already existing flora and fauna and being an inclusive part of that living unit rather than going the route of past human colonization.

Challenge Six – Growing need for better information.

The past decade has seen management restrictions placed on wildlife and habitat managers within government to reach outside for better information and quite frankly allowed the private resource extraction sector to run the way BC flora and fauna are managed. This thinking negatively impacted wildlife numbers to plummet and habitats to fragment to the state we find things today, which has prompted this discussion paper.

There are some good models currently in existence where knowledge sharing networks are working . A good example is the one operating under the Kootenay Conservation Program operating within the Kootenay Region of the province. Such a system could be put in place provincially and constructed using outside contract help. It would be available to decision makers, managers and the public at large.

Outside of BC there are several jurisdictions that have healthy wildlife numbers and managing habitat under a better conservation model than this province. Several jurisdictions close by (Idaho, Montana, Washington) which are smaller and, in some cases, higher human population are sustaining higher wildlife numbers than BC .So it can be done and we need to look at their models and see how we can use them here.

Lastly wildlife, habitat and fisheries staff need to be under one ministry and not with the current extraction based ministry they currently reside within. This will help to restore confidence in a battered group, allow progressive discussion in a face to face daily workplace and create a positive work environment. It will also place this knowledge base under one roof.

Challenge Seven – Human-wildlife conflicts.

In some areas of the province we have reached the carrying capacity for humans to coexist with wildlife and have adapted and/or changed their habitat so greatly that conflicts will remain an everyday interaction. Heck we can't even get along with ourselves so doing so with wildlife is beyond capability. Such areas like the lower mainland, southern portions of Vancouver Island and the Okanogan are such areas. Beyond these places there are management techniques which can be used as well within the 3 areas mentioned.

Seasonal awareness and staying out of areas used by wildlife at critical periods in their life can be used (birthing, rearing, seasonal migration). Creating movement corridors is important and all new development projects must have areas identified and put in place prior to development.

Where roadways require fencing then over and under passes must be installed at proper distances along the fenced portion. For agriculture fencing and such movement corridors must be planned for and incorporated with the fencing. In areas where highway fencing does not occur, and wildlife impacts are a concern then reduced speed with good signage need to be put in place. Lastly education in these areas must be in place and part of a human conflict education program.

Challenge Eight – Wildlife and Habitat funding.

Government has been told several times that under funding for wildlife and habitat management has been going on much to long and lately small steps have taken place. The funding model needs to be ramped up quickly in order to correct our poor management ways as well to compensate for climate change.

Some areas where government could step up and make this funding model happen sooner are within the tax base currently collected. The Pittman-Robertson model used in the USA is one that could be employed here. Taxes collected from items used in recreation, viewing and hunting of wildlife could be directed to wildlife management budgets. All commercial and non-commercial industries/companies pay to use the natural resource they wish to impact as well as well as first nations as previously mentioned.

The funding model put in place by BC Hydro – Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program is very small and not at all proportional to same model for the US portion (\$534 million) of the Columbia River Treaty. Within BC 30% of the Columbia Basin was impacted yet only \$5.8 million was allotted (2017) for compensation. The current amount should be increased to \$50 million per year to compensate communities, wildlife and habitats lost forever. There should be a COLA clause attached to the yearly amount made available.

This future plan is not about how humans will manage wildlife and habitat but rather how do human get back into the natural landscape they came from and co-exist with wildlife.

Richard